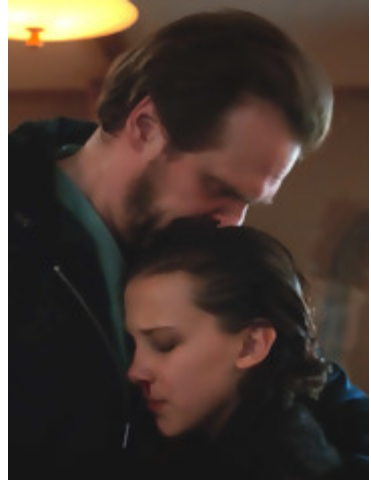

Light in Darkness by BadWolf85

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Genre: Angst, Hurt-Comfort
Language: English
Characters: Eleven/Jane H., J. Hopper, Joyce B., Will B.
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Summary: (Post Season 3) Life continues outside Hawkins. Eleven blamed herself for the death of her father. In the meantime, Hopper tries to survive... somewhere.

1. Day 76

Welcome to this fanfiction. I hope you like it.

First of all, I want to especially thank StrangerThanXsAnatomy, my beta reader, for making this story possible, thank you very much ;)

Chapter 1: "Day 76"

Goshen, Indiana

September, 1985

The alarm rang too soon, and the lights of her room rose. Eleven squinted, grunted, and rolled over pulling the pillow over her ears. It was the seventy-sixth day. She sat on the edge of the bed, thinking about how much her life had changed, and how much she'd lost. Three weeks had passed since they moved, and she was still getting used to the new room. Its walls filled with drawings, white furniture, and a bookshelf. Plenty of comics on its shelves.

Those books were a gift from her friends, a weird one you could say since she didn't like comics. Great heroes with incredibly good lives and superpowers. Come on, that only happens in stories. The real world was very different. There was no happy ending. Not for her. Everything that ever mattered to her had disappeared from her life. She missed Hawkins, her old cabin, her friends, Mike and…

Her eyes were wet with tears as she moved over the nightstand. She opened the drawer and pulled out a small wooden box. Her fingers ran over the lid but didn't open it.

"Honey, breakfast is ready," Joyce said from the door. "If you don't hurry, the boys will eat your plate too. Today I made pancakes."

The woman bit her lower lip, her eyes fixed on the wooden box in her hands. She knew what was inside it.

"Hey, Come on…" Joyce entered the room. "Is everything all right?"

Her voice softened as she squatted in front of the girl.

Eleven shook her head as her fingers gripped the box. "It's the day seventy-six." She stated as if it was an explanation.

It was. Putting emotions into words wasn't her strong point unless it was anger. Even then, she was more at ease with actions.

It wasn't her fault. Having spent the first twelve years of your life captive doesn't give you the best of education.

But, she made herself understand. After all, she had improved in recent years thanks to the time she spent with…

Joyce felt a twinge of pain in her chest. The memory of Hopper was still fresh, like an open wound. "Yeah, I know. I miss him too." She replied with a sad smile. "You know what? He would have liked you to go to school."

Eleven shook her head. "They are bad. They say ugly things about me."

The woman looked at her, surprised. How had she not noticed before? A new girl, without much knowledge, and with poor language skills was a bad combination; at least in school. It was clear that she had become the center of teasing. Children can be very cruel sometimes.

It had been hard to find a school for her in such a short time. Joyce had to convince the director with a story, so her shortcomings did not raise suspicions. Fortunately, Dr. Owens had used his contacts to help her. She didn't understand why, and she preferred not to know, but that man felt indebted to her family.

"Ignore them. They will soon get bored and leave you alone. Do the best you can while being yourself, and learn from any mistake you make. Don't let anyone tell you what to do."

"Myself." The girl repeated.

"Exactly," Joyce said getting up. "Now, go to the kitchen and devour your pancakes if Will and Jonathan have left you any."

Eleven got out of bed. She didn't want to disturb Joyce more than necessary. She had enough with the new home and work, not to mention having another mouth to feed and worry about. But every day she spent in school was worse than the last one. They had asked for discretion from the school board, but rumors about them had spread like wildfire. It is a school that was not huge, and any gossip was the topic of the day.

Eleven closed her locker with reluctance when a push from behind made her books fall to the floor.

"God, the geek doesn't even know how to walk." A girl stated while two others laughed in unison. It was Jodie, the most popular girl in school, and according to Eleven, also the most stupid. She ignored her -just as Joyce had recommended- and began to pick up her books without saying a word.

"Well... well, has the cat got your tongue?" Meows that caused more laughter accompanied Jodie's sarcastic voice. The noise got them some looks from the rest of the students who were passing through the hall.

The girl tried to pick up the last book, but Jodie stepped on it. "Hey, geek, I asked you a question, are you going to answer?"

Eleven looked up. The lack of her powers meant that she could only imagine throwing Jodie, and her ego, into the air. But there she was, stepping on her math book.

"Remove your foot." She advised.

"Oh! It seems that the kitten has got claws."

"I'm not a cat." Eleven responded, trying to get the book, which made Jodie step on it harder.

"No, you are not. You are an orphan geek who can't even speak."

A boy made his way through the gossips that were still watching the scene. "Leave her alone, Jodie."

Eleven breathed relieved to see Will, while Jodie just rolled her eyes in annoyance.

"Well ... the other geek. Do you have a club or something?"

Will came closer with anger. "I said leave her alone."

Eleven seized the distraction and yanked the book. That caught Jodie off guard, who had to hold onto a locker to keep her balance.

"Killjoy. We're leaving, but just because we got bored. Idiots." Jodie and her friends turned on their heels and walked away, laughing.

Will offered his hand to Eleven to help her up. "Are you ok?"

Eleven nodded, swallowing hard, trying to undo the lump in her throat; She didn't want the boys in the hall to see her cry. It wasn't because Jodie scared her, far from it. She just felt helpless, and that was the straw that filled the glass.

"El, don't let someone so insignificant affect you. They also made fun of me in Hawkins because I got better grades than them. And you know what?" Will was smiling. "At the end of the course, my mother bought me a new bike. Worth being the nerd of the class."

"Nerd?"

"I will tell you what it means on the way home. Okay? Also, today is Friday. It's the day we rent a movie from the video store! It was my turn to choose it but ... we will take whatever you want. Even if it's a cartoon" Will tried to make her smile. After all, Eleven had become a little sister for him. The duty of the older brothers was to protect and care for the little ones, at least that was what he thought. Eleven didn't need anyone to protect her, but she needed someone at her side.

They had ordered pizzas for the movie; Friday was the best day of the week for everyone, except for El. The reason was simple; the TV broadcast 'Miami Vice'.

It had been exactly seventy-six days that she had not watched that

series again. Not without Hopper. It was the series they always watched together. There were no excuses for being late, no matter if it rained, thundered or there was a hurricane warning. It was their time of the week and was simply special. Especially in the last months that she had spent less time in the cabin. On Friday nights there were no plans. Just watch an episode together, sitting on the old couch with a nice bowl of popcorn.

The Byers were trying to make Fridays easier for her. It was the day they ordered fast food and rented a good movie. They were trying to make her feel like one of their family, but it was still day seventy-six.

When the Goonies movie ended, Eleven got up from the couch. Like every Friday the silence was her farewell, only broken when the door of her room slammed.

Her body fell on the bed. "Not a good day." She muttered under her breath as her fingers retrieve the wooden box.

She took a note from inside and delicately unfolded it. She did not want that little piece of paper to break or deteriorate. For her it meant a lot, you can say, that it was her most precious possession.

She had read it a million times, she didn't even need the paper, and she knew it by heart. But those quick strokes printed with pen on a threadbare torn notebook sheet were all she had of him, of Hopper. The only person who helped her when she needed it most, without expecting anything in return. The stranger she ended up calling father.

"...It's just not how life works. It's moving, always moving, whether you like it or not. And yeah, sometimes it's painful. Sometimes it's sad. And sometimes, it's surprising. Happy.

So you know what? Keep on growing up kid. Don't let me stop you. Make mistakes, learn from 'em. When life hurts you, because it will, remember the hurt. The hurt is good. It means you're out of that cave!..."

"Now I'm in that cave, " Her voice was almost a murmur. "And I don't know… I don't know how to get out." Tears wet her cheeks. "You said life would hurt me, but not that it would take everything away from

me. That day I lost you, also my powers, my home, and my hope. I have nothing, Hop."

The girl curled up on the bed, pressing the crumpled paper against her chest. "Everyone tells me that the pain will pass with time, but it's a lie. Seventy-six days have passed and it still hurts like the first ... because I know ... that tomorrow you will remain dead." She spoke the words, stopping every so often to choke back sobs.

Her eyes closed. "I couldn't even look for you that day. Not without my powers. It's better that way. To remember you as you were."

To imagine seeing him dead, was enough to start sobbing without comfort. And when there were no more tears left to cry, end up falling asleep. She would wake up in a new day, the seventy-seven.

Three weeks earlier. Unknown place.

There was barely an hour left to finish his shift. Damn his luck when he heard the alarms sound. The chief scientist, Smirnov, approached the radar with fear. There was activity on the other side of the portal, which could only mean problems.

The sound of the door opening meant another problem. The general was there, followed by a platoon of soldiers. "You. Inform." He said pointing a finger at the scientist without even looking at him. His gaze fixed on the portal below them.

"We... we don't know, there is activity on the other side of the portal," He hesitated before continuing. "We should turn off the machine. It could be anything." The scientist craved. He remembered so well when a pack of Demogorgons appeared through the crack. Those beasts devoured all the comrades who worked that night with no mercy.

That attracted the colonel's attention. "Here, who decides if the machine shuts down or not is me." He didn't even have to raise his voice to freeze Smirnov's blood "The portal will remain open!"

"It's getting closer!" Another nervous scientist notified, pointing at

one of the radars. Everyone looked at the orange glow on the wall.

The colonel pointed at the portal. "Soldiers in front! Only shoot at my command!"

The men, armed with Kalashnikov rifles, stood in front of the portal, afraid of what they might find. The crack glowed, and in a few seconds, a figure appeared in front of them, walking towards them.

The soldiers looked at each other as they adjusted their fingers on their weapons. Fear was in the air. That figure was bigger than a Demogorgon.

"Aim!" The colonel shouted.

The fissure became bigger, and the figure began to take shape until a mysterious man appeared. He seemed disoriented and after what seemed to be his last effort, his body collapsed on the floor. None of the soldiers moved from their site. They weren't expecting that.

"What the hell..." Ivanov's astonishment was evident. He gestured to Smirnov, who cautiously approached the man lying on the floor. He didn't trust anything that came from the other side.

Trembling, his fingers searched for a pulse in the man's neck. All eyes were on him.

"He… he is alive but very weak." He stated.

The colonel looked astonished toward the portal. That was going to be a very long night.

To be continued…

Thank you for reading it! Please, if you liked it, just let me know with a review. :)

2. Nightmares

Here we go with another chapter. I hope you like it. I also want to thank my beta reader StrangerThanXsAnatomy for making this story possible. :) You can leave a review if you wish. They make me happy :D

__Note__ This chapter occurs a month earlier than the previous one.

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CHAPTER 2: NIGHTMARES

The upside-down.

August, 1985.

His feet wandered through the darkness. He had long stopped worrying about where he was going. Nowhere.

In such a place, he could only choose between a terrible path or a worse one. After spending so much time there, his needs had become very elementary. Get water and provisions, and try to avoid becoming the food of, what did the boys call them? Demo What? It didn't matter. Damn hellhounds.

Without a doubt, not having sunlight was driving him crazy. He never thought he'd miss something as simple as feeling that warmness on his face. Any light would have suited him. A spark to get him out of the gloomy endless darkness that overwhelmed everything.

It had been weeks, or months, it was hard to tell. The man can only measure time by his need for sleep. And even that wasn't reliable. Having several hours of sleep in a row was a luxury that he could not afford.

If it weren't because he had been there before, he would have thought he was already dead, and that was the damn hell. On second thought, he would have almost preferred to go to hell. It was always represented as a place on fire, and here everything was cold. Fuck, he

couldn't even light a fire to warm himself, he learned that the very first day he arrived.

Since the heat was a weapon against those creatures, he thought it was a great idea to light a fire to defend himself. But, in such a dark place, holding a torch was like putting a fluorescent signal on your head: 'Hey! Fresh meat in sight!' He almost died that day. No, he would not start a fire again unless it was necessary.

There were so many things he wouldn't do again. He missed the little everyday things; a good hot shower, he would sell his soul to the devil for that. Making fun of Powell and his lousy luck playing cards. Share a cigarette with Joyce... Oh God, Joyce. Now it was he who did not attend their date. "We're doomed…" He thought.

What tormented him most was thinking about El. He would never enjoy seeing her smile while eating Eggos.

Now he understood why the girl enjoyed those little moments so much. She never had them in that miserable laboratory, so they meant a lot to her. It was his turn to miss the little things, but it was useless to complain. Especially when you don't know how much time you have left. For a moment, his eyes closed, thinking if it was worth it.

Owens told him that this place was radioactive or something, but it didn't matter. He knew that place would kill him before any radiation. The time he had been there, he had seen everything, none of it good; creepers trying to catch him, the damn demogorgons looking for fresh meat and then there was... the other thing.

At that time, he had learned how to deal with them. It wasn't easy, but those creatures have a weak point under their necks, but even knowing that, he could only face two of them at most.

From three, the only way out was to run like a bat out of hell. Praying to find the right place to hide. Thank god, they didn't have a good nose to look for their prey.

That if you had a good day. Then there was something worse. He had only seen it twice, but that, whatever it was, froze his blood. A

monster with no face, no shape, only smoke, and shadows. He discovered it the first day he thought he was going to die. Oh, man... that day.

Four damn hounds cornered him, and his gun only had three bullets. Certain death. The brutish beasts circled him, savoring the moment, knowing he could not escape.

"Fuck, what are you waiting for? Come on! End this now!" He cried with all his might. That startled even him. It had been so long alone that he didn't also remember the sound of his voice. The dogs stood still for a moment, scared. "Here is the chief!" He shouted, believing his voice frightened them. To his disbelief, the animals turned around and run away until they disappeared from view, which made him smile. If he had known that shouting at them was enough, everything would have been more accessible.

Suddenly, He noticed an icy breeze on the back of his neck. It was weird, there was no wind down there. A shiver ran down his spine as he turned, and what he found left him breathless.

"Holy shit."

A tangle of shadows shaking, almost forming a body, was in front of him. His survival instinct made him aim his gun and shoot twice. The bullets went through that figure as if it were a ghost without effect. Idiot. You can't kill a shadow. That entity began to walk towards him. As it approached, he would have sworn he heard whispers.

His feet remembered how to walk and walked backward. That thing was moving faster, and he didn't think twice; he ran without even looking where. Whatever it was, he wasn't going to stay to find out.

The adrenaline flowed through his veins, making him faster. Even then, that wasn't enough to dodge a blow from the back knocking him to the ground. A tentacle of shadows grabbed his ankle. "You bastard!" He tried to hold on to the ground, but it was in vain, that thing dragged him back several meters.

He spun around to face that creature, tried to get up, but the shadow pounced on him without mercy. A weight felt on his chest that

prevented him from moving. He wanted to hit it, but his fists slipped and pierced it like smoke. "This isn't fair play." He did not know how to fight against a shadow, and yet that monster had subdued him. Why didn't he kill him at once? What was he doing?

His gaze fixed on a shadowy tentacle that was forming with a stinger on its end. He had only seen it once, when they rescued that boy, Will.

"No, no, NO! YOU SON OF A *****!" He gasped, horrified.

The images of that moment came back to his mind as distant memories. He saw himself removing that tentacle from the boy's body and trying to revive him again and again. Even the screams of Joyce filled his mind.

That vision was enough to know what the future held for him, a cold sweat fell down his face. The shadows were enveloping him as they finished forming the stinger.

"Shit!" He cried while trying to free himself.

"It's useless." A voice echoed in his mind.

"What the hell?!" He screamed as an excruciating pain ran up his head.

"Don't resist the inevitable, James Hopper. You and your whole world belong to me."

"GET OF MY HEAD!"

He had worked as an inspector in New York, witnessing unspeakable crimes there. He had faced a doctor telling him that his daughter had terminal cancer. Even Vietnam was still fresh in his mind. And yet, he could assure that this moment was the most frightening of all his life. The mere thought of being trapped, used by that thing, and buried in life indefinitely... It was so much for him. Fear mixed with the anxiety of not knowing how to escape.

His eyes saw that the sting was almost finished. He blinked, thinking about how to use the last bullet his pistol had. Who did he want to

fool? It had only one proper use.

"You are wrong." His tone was challenging, of those who know they have nothing to lose. It was obvious what to do. He placed the barrel of the gun on his temple and closed his eyes. "I am not yours."

Before pulling the trigger, he thought about El. The moments they had spent together. That icy night when she followed him in the forest, their nights watching tv on the couch, even their discussions... But also the incredible experiences they had shared. That terrifying day when they closed the portal. Oh god, that thing that came out of the crack ready to gobble them up, and how she, levitating, faced that monster without thinking...

The pressure on his chest began to loosen.

"I'm sorry, kid." His fingers adjusted on the trigger as his eyes were on the verge of tears. "I'm so sorry."

He imagined her facing that beast and defeating it. That comforted him at that very last moment. God, if he could only see her one last time, there were so many things to say...

A breeze brought him out of his thoughts, so fast, that he seemed to hear a horrible scream, like a howl, and then nothing. Silence flooded everything. His eyes flashed open, confused... the shadow was gone.

"NO!" Her heart was beating so fast that she thought it was going to get out of her chest. The scream woke up all of the Byers.

Immediately, an alarmed Joyce appeared through her bedroom door, followed by Will and Jonathan, a little sleepy. It was barely midnight.

Eleven looked around, she seemed disoriented, as if she didn't know exactly where he was.

"Honey, honey. That's it, it's over now." The woman approached the girl and wrapped her in her arms. "It has only been a nightmare."

"No ..." El retorted while taking refuge in that hug. "This has been different."

The girl had had nightmares since everything happened. She had woken up several nights soaked with sweat and screaming heartbreaking. Sometimes, her dreams tormented her with the mall monster. Other times, his mind was cruel enough to recreate the death of Hopper.

"Shh ... It's ok." Joyce murmured, trying to reassure the teenager. "Tell me about it, tell me what you have dreamed." The truth was she didn't want to know any details of the story. Every time El told her any of her dreams, she couldn't help going back to that moment. The worst moment in her life. Her life changed in just a second. The time it takes to turn a key. In a moment, you are alive, and a second later not. Everything you are disappears in a flash. "Everything is ok. I'm here, honey." She sighed, more to comfort herself than the girl. It had been hard months for both of them.

Eleven separated from Joyce and tried to think about what she had lived. She didn't know how to express it.

"It was different."

"Ok." Joyce comforted her with a gentle squeeze on her shoulder.

Eleven bit her lower lip trying to sort her thoughts.

"I wasn't anywhere. It was ... just sensations, but they were powerful. I felt like something was chasing me, it was catching me. I could not do anything ... "Her voice broke, showing how that experience had affected her more than other times. "I had to avoid ...I... I could only think of ..."

"Calm down, I'm with you. We are with you. You can tell us everything." Joyce looked at the boys who nodded, trying to reassure her.

Eleven's eyes felt down, ashamed. "I just wanted to die. I could only think about that." Tears began to fall down her face "Horrible. It has been horrible!"

"Calm down, it's over." Mumbled Jonathan.

The girl shook her head, she was still upset. "No, it's not over. You

don't understand... "Her face seemed frustrated.

Will sat down next to her "Well, explain it to us. You know that whatever happens, you are not alone in this."

El looked at them and nodded. "It wasn't a nightmare, it was real, they were... memories. "Insisted, "But they weren't mine."

"Who then?"

"I... I don't know."

Will and Jonathan looked at each other.

To be continued.

Do you like it? No? Let me know with a review. They make me happy and... write faster? :)

3. Remember the hurt

Here is the chapter 3! I hope you like it :D Thank you for reading it, and of course, Thank StrangerThanxsAnatomy my beta ;)

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Chapter 3: Remember the hurt

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Joyce lit a new cigarette. It was her second pack. As much as she tried to make sums on the calculator, the numbers didn't add up. Her head rested on her hand, with a sleepy expression on her face. "I can't believe it." The pencil fell on the table. It was evident that the new house generated more bills than they could afford. Jonathan also helped with his new job as a journalist, but it was difficult to make ends meet. The family had grown, and their new salaries were nothing to write home about.

She took a drag on her cigarette right just as the phone started ringing.

"Hello?"

"Joyce, is that you? Perfect, let's see. We have only forty seconds per call to avoid being tracked or heard, okay? All good?"

The woman rolled her eyes. Murray Bauman was definitely the definition of a paranoid conspiracy theorist man, and what was worse, she had to suffer his calls at least once a week.

"Yes, yes. All good for now." She leaned against the wall by the phone. It was going to be an exciting conversation. "For God's sake, Murray, I don't think anything's gonna happen if you ask me about the boys. In this city live many more worried boys and mothers; it's not of interest to anyone, not even for a boring telephone operator..."

"Shhh! Joyce, use ... the notebook! Oops ... have to go, thirty-five seconds." The line was cut, and annoying beeps indicated that Bauman had hung up.

"Great," She snorted as her nervous fingers extinguished the cigar in a nearby ashtray. That was far from being over.

The phone rang again, and Joyce picked it up again, knowing she had to summon all her patience.

"Don't say anything, Joyce, let me talk. Well, I will tell you that I have kept watching the forest and, well, although the deer have remained silent, and the frogs are still in the pond, according to my last ... sightings ... the white fox continues to hibernate until winter passes, but, the red fox has asked for... food but I don't know exactly what. I will continue to investigate."

She ran her hand across her forehead as her lips pressed to avoid shouting something obscene. She did not understand anything at all!

"Thirty-seven seconds," Murray stated before the line cut again. Seriously, one of these days, it would be she who hung up. Worst of all, she couldn't call him back. Not even to shout at him how absurd it was.

Murray believed that someone was chasing him, and that is why every time he called her, he used a different public phone. Even so, He had left her a phone number, but it was only for emergencies, and she could only call him in case of impending nuclear catastrophe. Yes, he had literally told her that. Annoying.

How Jim could have considered him a friend is something that escaped her understanding. A man so unnerving with a friend with little patience. That was a potential train wreck. A sad smile drawn on her lips. Several months had passed, and any reason was enough to remember him every day, thinking of everything that could be and was not. Joyce sighed.

Having nothing better to do until the boys return, she decided to check the famous Murray's notebook.

She kept it in a kitchen drawer, under the bowl where she put the cutlery. Who would look there? God, maybe she was becoming as paranoid as he was.

"Let's see." She said aloud as her fingers turned the pages. Bauman had written down several words and their meanings on the side. The forest was Hawkins, obviously. He had talked about a deer, something about a frog ... Oh yes, the white fox that hibernated and some food.

"Fox is ... Russians" She read. Damn it, those guys never got tired? And why had he distinguished between red and white? There were no more types of foxes in the notebook and no colors. Great.

"Food... here: Material. Well, this is not very specific, either. And winter? She passed the pages until she reached the end. "Fuck, Murray, to be so cautious, half of the keywords are missing!"

Joyce remained restless. She didn't know what he had meant by referring to winter, but if it had something to do with the Russians, it couldn't be right.

Eleven looked at the clock with contempt. There were five minutes left before the bell rang. What a boring class. If she had her powers, she would have moved the clock handle. The girl was having a hard time adapting to school, and not having ever been to classes before didn't make it easier.

Hopper had been preparing her for that moment. He taught her many new words and even brought her books about math. The man seemed obsessed with her learning to do counts. He always said that smart kids knew a lot about it, so it was the only subject that she was good at it.

Other days, if she was fortunate, he picked up a new book from the library. Somebody said that Hopper didn't get along with the Hawkins librarian, so making that effort to get El books was something she appreciated a lot.

Joyce was definitely right. He would have liked her to go to school. Perhaps, that was the only motivation that dragged her, day after day, to attend those dull classes. El couldn't let that effort have been in vain. She felt she owed it to him, it was an outstanding debt.

Finally, the bell rang and started a race by all students to see who left first the class. She finished putting away the books and saw that Will was already at the door. The boy had become her own shadow since she confessed witnessed the memories of another person.

"Ready to go home?" He grinned. "You will not believe it, but today in science class, a frog has escaped, and the professor almost has a heart attack!"

Eleven looked at him with some envy as she headed towards the exit. " Well, nothing unusual happened to me. Oh, yes." The girl pushed the door with a malicious smile. "Mr. Thompson has taken Jodie to the board to solve an equation ..."

"And? Came on, don't play hard to get."

She can't stop herself from laughing. "Well, Jodie is null in math. Then the teacher pointed at me, and I solved it without problems. You should have seen her face when he congratulated me. Whoa. It was super!"

Will and Eleven laughed until they stood in the small parking lot where they had left their bikes. They were not there.

"What?" The surprise was evident in their faces.

"Well ... it seems that someone has lost something, don't you feel sad guys?" A voice behind them replied.

"Jodie!" Exclaimed an outraged Eleven. "Give us back the bikes!"

"Oh Look... not only does she ridicule me in class, but the freak accuses me of being a thief. Wow... That's impressive. " Jodie put her arms around her waist and gave them a daring look. "Let's see if you can calculate this ... two geeks, minus two bikes ... equal to ... you're walking home."

Eleven quickly crossed the distance that separated her from the other girl. "I said, give them back to us." The tone she used made it clear that she was angry, so Jodie's friends began to approach them. They were at least five.

Will took Eleven by the shoulder. "Come on, it's okay... we'll find them," he said, using a conciliatory tone as he looked at the group. The boy definitely didn't want problems.

"Yes, listen to your friend, geek. And go look for them elsewhere."

Eleven took another step. "No!" she was practically nose to nose with the other girl "You will tell us where they are, and you will tell us now!"

Jodie whistled slyly. "And why would I do that? Should I be afraid of you or something?"

Will stood between them. "Come on, Jane, we'll be late."

The boy did not like that scene, he had heard rumors in the school that it was better to go along with that group, they could be real thugs if they wanted to. They said that even one of them had a pocket knife.

"But who invited you to get into this?" One of Jodie's friends punched Will in the stomach, and he doubled in pain.

Eleven witnessed it helplessly, "Will!" She couldn't believe it. The problems were with her, and in the end, there were always others who paid for it.

"Don't worry, I'm fine." Will groaned, trying to straighten.

Jodie took advantage of the distraction and grabbed Eleven by the collar of her shirt, holding her tightly. "Listen to me, fool. If you make me look ridiculous again in class, I swear that you and your friend will regret it. This time they were your silly bikes, but later, well ... who knows."

Eleven looked at her without saying anything. She really didn't know what to say. How could that girl hate her so much, without even knowing her?

"Please, you're boring," Jodie said, releasing her. "No wonder your father is dead, sure it was your fault." She put on a face of intense sorrow. "You killed him of boredom."

Her friends started laughing and left together to another nearby bicycle parking lot.

El was stuck on the site. She shrank, and for a moment, her body forgot how to breathe.

Will began to worry. "Calm down, El, don't listen to them. You know it is not true."

A tear began to fall down the girl's face as she shook her head. In recent months if she had time for something, it was for thinking. Reflect on what she could have done and did not do. How she could have saved Hopper.

"He was with me when I closed the portal of the laboratory. He protected me," The girl murmured. "I wasn't with him when he had to close the Russian one."

"Come on, El, don't do this to yourself. We all did what we could, okay? It was not anyone's fault, let alone yours. You have saved us many times." Will went to hug her, but she turned away from him in anger.

"Yes, it was." There was a determination in her eyes. She believed it. "I was not strong enough to keep my powers, nor quick to dodge that monster in the cabin, nor ready to have known that he would need my help. It's my damn fault!" She screamed.

Jodie and her group turned as they heard that cry and laughed again. Eleven felt an inner unease; tears fell faster. She looked around, feeling nauseous. Everything was out of focus.

El tried to take a deep breath, but her chest ached. She only listened to Will, far away, calling her name and the laughs ... those laughs ... made her sick. The girl felt her head was about to explode and put her hands on both temples.

They had hurt Will right in front of her, and ... were they mocking Hop's death? How dare they?! Messing with her was one thing, but messing with her loved ones was something very different.

.

...When life hurts you, because it will, remember the hurt. The hurt is good. It means you're out of that cave...

.

"Let's go El, they don't deserve your tears." Said the boy in a last attempt to calm her.

"No ..." Her voice was almost inaudible. "No!" Finally, she could breathe air into her lungs, "NoooooooOOOO!" That screech full of rage and pain frightened several birds that flew in fright.

A tremendous crunch echoed through the air, and Will spun fast enough to see a significant branch split. It was from the tree that was just above Jodie's friend's bikes.

"What the... hell!" They stated in disbelief just as the big crunch sounded in front of them.

The branch had fallen just above their bikes, reducing them to simply redoubled irons with no greater use than to end up in the landfill.

Will stared at Eleven. Her nose was bleeding.

To be continued

BTW... Reviews make me happy :)

4. Into darkness

Thank you for your support and reviews! You are… fantastic! :D

Crazytime000: Well… you'll have to read this one ;P

Glouton: Here is more of the shadow monster. Enjoy it! :)

RB: Thank you very much!

StrangerThanXsAnatomy, my dear beta reader: Thank you as always!

CHAPTER 4: INTO DARKNESS

.

Will watched El with concern. They had been locked in her room all day, trying to make some sense of what had happened that afternoon at school. She had asked him to keep that a secret, and although he didn't like to lie to his mother, El had given him several compelling reasons. They shouldn't worry Joyce more than necessary, the woman had enough with the bills and the house.

"We should tell my mother ..." the boy declared, trying to avoid the solemn silence that had settled between the two.

Eleven snorted, "No. Not until we have something to tell."

"Something to tell? El, you've broken a tree branch with your powers!" Will respond in disbelief.

She shook her head stubbornly. "I am not sure about that. It could be a coincidence or even just the wind."

"The wind? Are you kidding me?" He had never seen El so irritable. It was as if everything bad that happened in the world was her fault.

She gestured to continue with what they had been trying to do in the last hour. Reluctantly, Will put back an empty canister of coke on the

floor.

Eleven looked at it; she imagined in her mind that she was crushing it, twisting it, but it was just that, an imagination. The canister remained there without moving an inch. It was as if that piece of metal was laughing in her face, hard.

"I can't do it." She stated, giving a blow to the can that rolled under the bed until disappearing. Will huffed, he was just as tired as she, but at least they had to try it.

"Calm down. What you did this afternoon was incredible. Do you know why? Because it means that you have not lost your powers, at least not at all. Maybe you need time."

"Time," She repeated, upset. "It's been almost four months. What if they never come back?"

His chest heaved, sucking air into his lungs. It was so cold that it returned him to the world of the living. Eventually, he opened his eyes. Everything was blurred, and he had to blink several times until the room began to focus. Then He realized that he was lying on the floor, and suddenly, memory flooded back; he would have almost preferred to remain unconscious.

He grunted as he tried to sit up, his muscles were burning with pain. He supposed he had been in the same position for too long, so his body was screaming at him not to move, but his brain didn't agree.

He moved an arm, then a leg, finally managing to roll sideways and raise himself on an elbow. With an effort that made him dizzy, he leaned his back against a nearby wall. He jerked his head around, wincing with pain, and a tremendous desire to throw up, although he didn't know very well what. The man had not tasted a decent meal for so long that his stomach had given up protesting.

"Ironic. Who would have thought that Smirnoff was right?" His husky voice murmured to the darkness, his only companion.

In there, they prepared pigswill food. It was so bad that if you tried a

Slurpee later, you could correctly differentiate a whole world of nuances and flavors. He was sure that then he could distinguish between one of strawberry and one of cherry — God, what he would have given for a good glass of ice and sugar.

He smiled in the dim light, just thinking about it. After all, he couldn't complain about that either. Now they fed him, and he could sleep the whole night through. There were some nights that the screams of other prisoners woke him up. He didn't understand what was happening because he had only learned a couple of words in Russian, but they took people away and did not know very well why. It was clear that for nothing good.

The truth is that he didn't care about it either. If he had to choose, he preferred a Russian to shoot him in the back of his head, than a beast devouring him in the world upside down, or worse.

Instinctively he touched a part of his stomach with his hand, wincing as a wave of pain run through his chest. The Russians bandaged it, but despite having already spent several weeks, it burned as the first day. Judging by the spots of dried blood on the fabric, it was still oozing.

"I thought I escaped from you. But you left me a good memory here."

Just before crossing the portal, he had a second encounter with the shadow monster. The man could remember that moment with great detail. How could he ever forget it? That thing caught him by surprise when he was about to cross over to the other side. A tangle of shadows began to swirl, forming the monster, standing between him and the portal.

"No. NO! JUST NO! No monster, no shadow can stand on my way! Not now! I'm so close!"

He cursed heaven for that. It could not give him hope by showing him a portal and snatch it right away with that monster in the middle. It was not fair. None of that was remotely fair. Not when he was so damn close to his... salvation? He didn't care what would find on the other side. He just wanted to go away from that place and that was an opportunity.

Everything happened very fast; the shadow charged to him, ready to nail the damn stinger on him to God knows what. He was able to dodge it by a miracle, but it grazed his abdomen, cutting deep his skin. "Holy shit!" He grunted as the pain shot up his chest, trying hard to ignore the sensation. His fists clenched as he saw the shadow coming back for him. With all of his might, he ran to the portal without looking back. No shadow was going to stop him.

A hurricane wind was behind him, he didn't look back, knowing what he would find.

"You can't escape." Those words echoed in his mind.

"To hell with you!" The wound was burning and losing blood. But being closer and closer to the portal gave him enough strength to keep running.

His mind returned to the present. "Damn it." He cursed as the pain subsided, for he knew that was going to leave a scar, although it was a good reminder.

Thinking about what he had suffered and what that monster could have done with him had helped him cope with the last weeks. The Russians were tireless, but somehow, they could not compare with the horrors he had suffered in the world upside down.

Since he arrived there, they had questioned him several times each day. At first, they used brute force to try to worm information. How ridiculous. Physical suffering cannot make a dent in someone who comes from the damn hell.

They usually gave him all the blows and punches that his body could endure until he was unconscious. But when he woke up in the cell, he discovered that at least they worried about changing his bandage. It was clear that they wanted to keep him alive, at least for now.

He also discovered that they moved him. He didn't know where, but it had to be far. It was less cold, or maybe, his body had grown accustomed to those temperatures, he no longer knew anything for sure. Not since the Russians changed their way of interrogating him.

"I start to see the black hole. I try to resist, but," The man looked at his hand, a slight tremor ran through his muscles.

He rested his head on the wall, his face soaked in cold sweat. It was one of the symptoms. In the last week, they had decided to use some drug, truth serum, or who knows what. It produced tremors, sweat, and after waking up, gaps in his memories. He practically didn't remember anything.

"I don't know how long I can hold." His eyes closed, tiredly.

In each new interrogation session, the Russians knew more than the last time. That could only mean that whatever they were using with him, it worked. Guilt corroded him. They were close to discovering Eleven, and he would never forgive himself for it.

Everything went black. Eleven didn't know how she made it, but she was in the void. Her feet touched the flooded ground, but other than that, there was nothing else.

"Hello?" The girl asked, looking for some answer. She didn't know what was more disturbing, whether silence or darkness. After a minute, a wall appeared. Her brown raised, not understanding the meaning of that.

Her fingers touched the smooth surface, and she thought she heard a whisper. *"Damn it."* There was someone behind the wall.

The girl ran to the edge, and when she crossed it, a large lump formed in her throat when she saw a man leaning against the cement.

That man was Jim Hopper. She looked at him closely and immediately regretted doing it. He had lost a lot of weight. His skin was paler than usual, and dark marks were visible beneath his eyes, which had the look of someone who had been under immense pressure. She could tell he had been through a lot.

That image cracked her heart, but what broke it down was to observe his eyes. His blue orbs had turned grey, lost their brightness, and seemed lost.

She knelt beside him, "Hop, I'm here." Emotions didn't let her think clearly. She was glad to see him alive, but at the same time, it hurt to see him like that. She wanted to comfort him, to tell him he wasn't alone.

"I start to see the black hole. I try to resist, but,"

He had always been her rock, her protector. Not that she needed to be protected, but Hopper inspired confidence, some stability. Maybe not ever in the right way, but he was in charge of everything going well. Seeing him so broken was heartbreaking.

"I don't know how long I can hold."

El felt a twinge in the stomach. "Hold on. I will find you." She put her hand on his cheek. "I promise."

Her fingers pierced Hopper, as if it were a ghost. His whole body began to evaporate, becoming smoke, disappearing.

Eleven looked scared at her empty hands. "No! No please, don't leave me!" She felt dizziness but kept screaming, hoping that in the distance, he could hear her "Hold on! I'm going to find you, I promise!"

The darkness began to clear, and distant voices spoke to her.

"Honey come on! Wake up!"

El opened her eyes and met a pretty nervous Joyce. Behind was Will, just as scared as her mother.

"What?" The girl looked around, confused. It was her room, but why was everything spinning around?

Immediately Jonathan entered, bringing a damp towel to his mother, "Don't worry, I already have you, ok?"

"What happens? Why am I dizzy?" El looked at her reflection in a wall mirror in front of her. She could hardly see both the nose and the ears were bleeding. Joyce drained the towel of the extra water and began to clean her blood.

"Calm down. The bleeding has stopped. But you better lie down. Don't worry, it's just been a bad dream, and it's barely midnight." The woman stated.

"I..."

Jonathan helped her down carefully to bed "Shh ... nothing happens."

"Joyce…" El started, "I saw him."

The woman inspired air. "I know, honey. I know. But remember, they are only nightmares. It's not real."

"No ... Joyce. I saw him. Hopper. I have seen him." El took the woman's hand, "He's alive."

If you like it, please, don't be lazy. The review button is right below here! :)

5. Phantom Signal (Part I)

Thanks for all your reviews. You're great!

guest: I'm glad you like it!

AnnieRavenclaw707: You're very kind!

crazytime000: No, it was not angst enough. :D

sydmun17: Thank you! I hope this new chapter doesn't disappoint you! :)

StrangerThanXsAnatony: Thanks again for your work beta Reading this! :)

Chapter 5: Phantom Signal (Part I)

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The fork didn't stop moving around the bowl. El held it taking nothing into her mouth.

"Will you take a bite of salad?" Joyce's tone showed a hint of concern as she spoke.

"I've already told you. I'm not hungry," El replied as the fork dug into her meal.

Joyce observed as the girl jabbed with anger the contents of her plate. "The lettuce isn't to blame." She responded with a chuckle before her voice became serious again. "Be patient."

"Is he not going to appear? We have been here for more than half an hour" The fork fell to the table, loudly.

Joyce sighed. Deep down, She knew the girl was right. They had been driving almost a whole day, and to top it off, the woman had had to make up to four calls with five different people to locate Bauman. She can't believe that the emergency number he gave her was his

mother's phone. Seriously? At least, the lovely old woman would have promised to contact him. And there she was. With a teenager on the verge of impatience while she blamed herself for having left her boys at home.

"I don't like this place. We're wasting our time. And it's... so noisy" El looked around, disgusted.

Bauman had requested to meet them at a roadside bar that was practically in the middle of nowhere. The entire counter was full of truckers, laughing and shouting while watching a soccer match on television. It was unbearable. Why they didn't stop laughing? That sound was drilling her eardrums. In recent months, happy people bothered her more than usual. Why couldn't she be the same as the others? Oh, and the guy at the opposite table. A colossal newspaper covered his face and made too much noise when he passed the pages. El thought about throwing the fork at him. She was going crazy.

"What if he doesn't come?" The girl asked.

Joyce fiddled with her fingers as she looked out the window, observing the parking lot and waiting to see Murray get out of a car.

"Well ..." She hesitated, "If he doesn't come, we'll try to look for him in another way. Look, I know you're worried, and I understand. But…"

Eleven pushed the plate and looked away from the table, angry. "We have to find him, Joyce. We are wasting time and ... there is no time. He is hurt. He needs help and soon."

The girl couldn't get the image of Hopper out of her mind. Wasted and hopeless. In fact, she had barely been able to sleep that night.

Joyce pursed her lips. She understood the girl's unease, but they had nowhere to start searching on their own, they needed Bauman's help, he had contacts and had been investigating in recent months, maybe he had some clue. Besides, She didn't know for sure if Hopper was really alive. It could have been another nightmare. The woman had been dragged by Eleven simply because she also wanted to believe he was alive... somewhere.

"We will do our best to discover what happened. Ok?" Joyce stated.

El's gaze pierced the woman, "So, you don't believe me."

"I didn't say that." Joyce tried to defend herself. After all, She was there when everything happened, knew that Hopper could not have survived. Could he? Why was she cheating herself?

"Enough!" The man in front exclaimed, closing the newspaper with a bang.

Joyce turned grumpily. "Excuse me?"

Murray Bauman got up and with a theatrical outrage and threw away the newspaper he had been reading on the girls' table.

"For the love of God. You can't read quietly with so much yackety-yak." Bauman spoke as he walked to the exit.

Joyce's jaw opened to reply, but Eleven pointed to a written note in the newspaper. "Parking lot. Now. Blue Chevrolet."

The woman rolled her eyes.

Murray's new house was quite picturesque. Joyce began to doubt if it had been a good idea to ask him for help. That was not the house of a paranoid man, but of an authentic lunatic one. The walls were full of newspaper clippings, photographs, pen notes, and many of those notes were bound with colored threads. All this formed a web that she had not seen even in the best detective films or... murderous psychopath ones.

"Good. Welcome to my humble home. Here we are secure, and we can talk about that worries you so much, but please, come in, make yourself comfortable. Something to drink? Vodka, maybe?" Bauman asked, strolling through some boxes with more newspapers that filled the floor of the room.

Joyce looked worriedly at all the mess, without believing what her eyes saw. "No, eh... Murray, there is no time for that."

"Come on, Joyce, there is always time for Vodka!" He said, disappearing into what looked like some kind of a kitchen.

Joyce and Eleven looked at each other, words were not necessary. The girl raised her eyebrow, asking if this man could really help them, in her opinion, the one who needed help was him. The older woman shook her head, disregarding that disorder.

"Murray, I…" Suddenly, Joyce stopped talking, stunned by what her eyes saw. In the background was a man sitting in a chair. He was attached to a radio relay, with headphones that kept him absorbed from what was going on around him. "Who the hell is that?!" Her voice a mix of a yell and a murmur.

Murray looked at the radio set. "Oh. Don't worry. It's agent Jones. A little sparing in words, but he does his job."

"Are you insane!?" Now she was screaming. "Agent?" Joyce did not leave her astonishment. "You're kidding, right?" Before she could continue, the other man had noticed them and rose from his post. He looked uneasily at Bauman and then at the woman. His surprise was more significant when he saw the kid. His eyes narrowed at Bauman without knowing very well what he should do.

"Hey, yes, of course. Joyce, I introduce you to Eric Jones. Federal agent. And this is Joyce, a friend and…" Bauman turned to El, thinking about how to introduce her, but Joyce stepped forward. "She is Jane. My... niece."

The girl just nodded as she looked at the federal agent uncomfortably. They didn't have time for ridiculous presentations, although she realized that the feeling was mutual. Jones looked back at her in bewilderment and annoyance.

Eleven just observed him, he was a big man, not as much as Hopper but bigger than Bauman. The girl assumed he wasn't more than forty years old; Tall and thin, with dark hair and hazel eyes that were looking straight at her. It was clear that he saw her as an interruption.

Bauman tried to calm his guest. "Good. Now we know each other.

Well, then it's time to tell you my new discoveries!"

"Murray, can we talk?" Joyce took Bauman's arm and led him to the kitchen.

"What the hell is all this about? Who really is that guy?" She spoke, making sure that the agent was not listening.

Bauman made a silly face and took two vases, filling them with a bottle of Vodka. He was going to need it. "Joyce. Calm down. I have it all under control." He emptied his glass. "More or less."

"Seriously? It turns out that the most paranoid man in the world trust a government agent? What have they done with you, Bauman?!"

"Spare me!" His glass was filled again. "Look, Joyce. I have been investigating in the last months all that I have been able to, but this ... goes beyond a journalistic report or a conspiracy. This is war, an international conflict between two powers. Did you really think I wasn't going to ask the government for help? I'm not that crazy!"

Joyce opened her mouth to answer but closed it again.

"Apparently, the Russians are still hanging around here. They don't let themselves be seen much, but I know they are still here. Don't know the reason. So, I had to ask Owens for help, he said he would send someone to help me, and in less than two hours, Jones appeared at my door. This is more serious than it seems. Since when are they in such a hurry?"

Joyce snatched the glass and drank it in one gulp.

Murray smiled as she made an unpleasant face. "I already explained it to you when I called. I guess that's why you're here."

"Oh, that. Yeah, the thing with the forest and the foxes. The coded message? To be honest, I didn't understand a single word." She confessed.

"Then why are you here?" He was confused.

"Yes. Tell it now." Eleven said from the doorframe, next to Jones.

"What the?! This is a private conversation!" Joyce exclaimed, annoyed.

The federal agent crossed his arms. "Stops being private when the screams are heard throughout the whole house."

"Anyway! I think it's time to talk about my new discovery!" Murray ignored all of them and went to the central room, taking a notebook from a big wooden table that was in the middle. "The Russians are looking for something! Or... are discovered something. I don't know what... BUT!" He did a dramatic face as he threw away some papers from the table, trying to clear it to put new notes on it. "They had stolen classified property from the U.S. government."

Jones was the first to spoke. "What?! That's not possible."

"What do you mean by 'property.' Like... someone?" Joyce said, testing the waters.

Murray looked at the two a bit disappointed. "What? Not that I know." His finger pointed with enthusiasm to his notebook. "They had stolen the security records from the Starcourt mall." He finished, excited.

"What, sorry? What for? The mall was theirs." El asked, a bit lost.

"Exactly. That night in the mall, they had to run away from the base when the American army rushed inside. They could manage to take away everything in the secret base. Except... they couldn't do that with the mall upside. Why they would take so much risk to steal the security records now, months later?"

Everyone was looking at Bauman, waiting for a response. "They must have discovered something, right now, about that night. And whatever it is, it must be significant enough to rob the American government's super-secret files to find out."

Jones buffed. "As I said, it's impossible. All the Starcourt material from that night was stored and is protected in the pentagon itself with stringent security measures. The Russians can't enter there. Your informant is merely wrong."

"I assure you that my informant is right. And..." His brow furrowed as if something has been overlooking. "Joyce. If you aren't here because of the Russians, what is it?"

Joyce glanced at the two men, unsure. "Well... we think ... there would be some chance that ... okay, the truth is ... it would be possible that ..."

Bauman made wild gesticulations with his hands. "For heaven's sake, spit it out!"

El shocked her head, tired. "Hopper is alive."

"Sorry, what?" Bauman looked up at Joyce, searching for confirmation. He didn't find any. "Are you talking about Jim? The same Jim... You know..., big, arrogant and self-opinionated man? Our Jim?"

"It's... complicated to explain. But, it could be a possibility that Jim survived." Joyce started, "I need you to think about everything you've seen in recent months if anything can be related to Hopper, any small thread, any clue, something."

Murray remained silent. His gaze fixed on the opposite wall, it seemed that his mind had gone elsewhere. Joyce came to believe that he was having an aneurysm.

"Murray? Are you ok?"

"Don't talk to me. I need more Vodka."

It was late. Night had already fallen, although in that hole Murray called home, it was barely distinguishable whether it was day or night.

Bauman was still immersed in his notebooks, nothing matched what Joyce told him. Had she suddenly gone crazy? No one could survive that, and yet, he had seen so many strange things in recent months that ... he just didn't know what to think, so he gave her a small vote of confidence and decided to look for some clue in his notes.

Meanwhile, Joyce kept moving her fingers, nervous and clearly absorbed. Suddenly a bag fell to her side, pulling her out of her thoughts. The woman looked up to meet Jones.

"I'm sorry. It's the only thing I could find at this time, but you should eat something. Between you and me, don't share it with Bauman, or he'll get used to it." He muttered slyly.

Joyce returned a slight smile. Such courtesy. "Hey, I'm sorry… about before. But I find it strange that someone like you is here." She realized that she was not settling the things by saying that. "Excuse me again. I…"

"It's crystal clear that you don't like a federal near you."

"Yes." Joyce's eyes widened, realizing her error. What the hell was she thinking? Admitting that implies that you have something to hide and could make him believe that you could be a potential criminal. "Well... I'm not... I"

Jones smiled, guessing her thoughts. "Relax. I don't know any criminal that travels with her family" He grinned, pointing at El, who was peacefully sleeping on a sofa nearby.

Joyce signed, a bit relieved. "The trip was very long, and she was exhausted. But she'll appreciate the burgers when she wakes up. Thank you."

"Well... The day has been very long for everyone, you don't know what it is to survive Bauman for a... whole week," He emphasized his words dramatically. "I'm going to rest. And you should sleep too." He gave one last look to Bauman. "When he starts looking, it's like a hound, it doesn't stop. If you need blankets, there is more in the back closet."

Joyce nodded thankfully as the federal agent left the room and returned her attention to the hamburger. It seemed delicious. Before she could take the first bite, a notebook was thrown against the wall.

"Found something?" She teased.

Murray looked at her. If looks could kill... He took a deep breath and

then faced her. A solemn posture announcing that it would not be a yes or no answer. "Joyce. What are you hiding from me?"

"Sorry. What?"

"Seriously. You come after four months because right now, it has given you to think that" Murray trailed off as his hand rubbed his forehead, "Joyce. This isn't good for you. Look, I know that you and he had ... something ... but Jim was also my friend, and I don't think he wanted you to waste your time looking for ... a ghost. "

"Do you think that I'm making this up?"

"Why come back after four months? What changed now?" The woman remained silent, so he continued, "Look... You have no proof. By God, Joyce, you were a witness. No one can survive that explosion. Jim was a tough guy, but he was just a man. Don't create false hopes. Don't do this to yourself…"

She cleared her throat. "This ridiculous conversation... does that mean you haven't found anything?"

He could have answered a million things, but he didn't want to hurt her. "Joyce. Go to sleep."

She was about to respond to him when a sound shocked them. It was white noise.

Surprised, Murray went to the radio table, "Jones must have left it on."

Just suddenly, the white noise became voices. It was a man and he was speaking Russian.

Hope you're enjoying it. Please, let me know what do you think :)

6. Phantom Signal (Part II)

I'm sorry for the delay updating this. Anyway, I'm very happy with your reviews and follows! Thank you very much!

thebreeze105.5 : Thank you for your kind words! ;)

sydmun17: Wow, your review means a lot to me because I'm a mess with a story with lots of characters.

angryfanfic: I hope you like this chapter too!

crazytime000: Prepare for this chapter! :)

*** WARNING: This chapter contains torture. If you are uncomfortable reading about such topic, don't read it. You've been warned.

***** AUTHOR's NOTE: I want to announce that my beta reader has banished (No idea why :( ) so I would like to ask if someone would like to beta read this story. My first language isn't English so, in order to update it, I'll need someone to check the grammar errors. Please, PM me if you would like to help me :) This chapter wasn't checked so... I'm very sorry for my grammar or inconsistencies.**

CHAPTER 6: PHANTOM SIGNAL (PART II)

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With tremendous speed, Jones ran to connect a kind of cassette recorder to the radio while Murray took a pen and a notebook, ready to write down everything. It was not the first time they intercepted a Russian signal.

Joyce looked at them nervously because she didn't understand a word of what the radio was broadcasting. A cigarette would have been good.

"Murray, what happens!" She exclaimed on the verge of a nervous

breakdown.

Both men turned to ask her to shut up. After a minute, which Joyce thought was an eternity, Murray looked up, surprised.

"It's odd. This signal is not a retransmission of any code, or a statement or even a message. It's as if someone was spying on a conversation and broadcasting it on the radio. The dial is not even correct. It's damn weird."

Joyce opened wide her eyes realizing what they were hearing. Without saying a single word, she went to the sofa where El was. The girl was still asleep, but a thread of blood fell from her nose. That was no coincidence. The woman quickly returned to the radio station and looked very seriously at Bauman. "This is not just any conversation. Translate it, Murray."

Joyce's tone of resentment and anger was enough not to question that order. "They are medical terms; they speak of a dose of something. I don't know very well, wait, now someone else is talking. It is throwing him in the face of being wrong."

"Dose of what?"

Murray rolled his eyes. "If you don't shut up, I can't catch up!"

Joyce crossed her arms, trying to be patient.

"Ok. The Russians are talking about sodium, yes, sodium pentothal. What the hell is that? I have no idea."

"I do." Jones stated, "It's a drug; it's used to make truth serum."

Joyce looked at him, shocked. "That exists? Really?"

The federal nodded at them, serious. "You're right. It's not an ordinary conversation. It's an interrogation."

Bauman felt nervous all of a sudden, "But to who?"

The woman yelled at him. "Translate, now!"

El stepped through the void, hearing distant, distorted voices. She closed her eyes, took a deep breath, and paid full attention to the sound, was getting closer. The girl opened her eyes and saw a man sitting in a chair.

Without thinking straight, she raced to him. His wrists handcuffed behind the back, showing marks that indicated that he had tried to struggle without success, his head down, exhausted.

"Hop?" El stood by his side, observing him. His eyes were half-open, and his breathing was elaborate, panting as if being awake was a great effort. Her fists clenched until her knuckles turned white. What had they done to him? Hopper was worse, and there was no progress in finding him. The feeling of helplessness filled her. Why couldn't she locate him? It was what she knew how to do best, and yet she couldn't discover it. The answer was easy. El had sought strangers or friends who were not at imminent danger. Sentiments were playing tricks; she had to keep her head cold. Concentrate only on the place, on the details, on the sound.

The voices intensified in her mind. They talked weird, didn't understand what they were saying. Then appeared a dense fog that became two figures. One wore a military uniform, the other a white coat, like a doctor. They seemed angry with each other and then heard a distant voice that was translating what those men said. Was it Murray? She smiled; the bald eagle was good after all.

"I told you it was too soon. His body has not yet expelled the previous dose; he can't take it anymore until at least one day passes."

"It's your fault; apparently, you have not measured well. Besides, we are running out of time. We have the U.S. government snooping very close, and the Kremlin demands evidence to justify the operation. The American knows who she is and where she is, and he will tell us, no matter what."

"But Colonel Ivanov ... he isn't able to ..."

The military ignored him and turned to Hopper. "Hey you, it's not time to fall asleep, we're not done with you yet." He snapped his fingers and pointed at someone. Another soldier appeared behind the

prisoner, who grabbed his hair, making him look up at the colonel. The movement stirred him a little, but he was too shattered even to protest. His glassy eyes attempted to focus on his surroundings.

"Let's try again." The colonel took a picture and put it in front of Hopper. "Who is she?"

El was curious and watched the image, and her surprise was enormous. It was a picture of her and Hopper, taken the terrible night they parted at the mall. How is that even possible? It was a black and white photo, a little blurry, and of poor quality. How did they have that picture? And what did they want?

She concentrated, needed to focus, clear her mind, make an attempt - perhaps impossible - to get more information. More. A table appeared next to the doctor.

El went to it. On its surface, she could see several medical utensils and some empty syringes. A sickening feeling almost made her vomit, thinking that they probably have used them with Hop, a knot appeared in her stomach, and for a moment she wanted to turn away. "Cold head. Cold head" A deep breath filled her lungs as she kept looking. Next to the doctor was an open folder with pictures coming out of it. She could not open it, so only observe. There were several images; all were from the mall and all taken from the same place, with the same angle. A security record? Oh! Her brain realized what Murray had told them about the stealing of some recordings from the government. Those must be pictures extracted from the records.

Her pulse sped up; they were pictures of her when she threw the car to the Russians bad men, the giant mead monster, the hug with Hopper. Her legs trembled as she felt a spinning sensation. No, her vision can't conclude, not yet; she still hadn't been able to locate where they had Hopper. Her hands came to her temples, trying to ignore the feeling of dizziness.

"Who is she?!" Ivanov roared, apparently starting to lose his temper.

Hopper opened his mouth; it seemed he was going to say something, but was miles away from there, so he just gasped. After what seemed like a great effort, hi lips managed to stammer something. "Eleven"

The colonel raised his arms angrily and headed towards the doctor. "He is too stunned. He doesn't even know what he says, the same number, over and over, it's ridiculous."

The doctor shrugged. "I told you it was too soon for another dose. You have to wait for him to detoxify."

That was not the answer his boss wanted to hear. The coronel furrowed. "Nonsense, Smirnov. Give him something, so he brightens up."

"I can't give him anything else; it would kill him. Right now, he's a shaker with legs."

The colonel took Smirnov by the shoulders and used a more leisurely voice, to intimidate him. He was the best at that. "I will give you a brief reminder. Here two things are done. We fulfill the orders and our duty." He paused, squeezing the doctor's shoulders. "In case you have forgotten, your duty right now is to keep this asshole alive until I get the information, and the orders are that you give him something to brighten him up. Go!"

Smirnov gulped, the message was clear: Do what he told or you'll regret it. He scratched his chin and searched among all the vials on the table. He would have to improvise.

Ivanov gave an order to the other soldier who stared impassively at everything that happened in that room as if it were something almost ordinary for him. "Hold him."

Hold him? Why? He could barely sit on the chair. Her lungs felt a lack of air. What would they do with him?

The soldier tilted the prisoner's head and held it firmly, exposing his neck. "No ..." Hopper murmured under his breath, knowing what comes next.

The colonel moved closer to him, looking at his eyes with disdain. "Then tell me who she is, and this will be over."

The American blinked, confused, disoriented, trying hard to answer him. "El-even?"

Irritated, the colonel shook his head and made a gesture to his subordinates. Almost immediately, Hopper felt the needle prick the side of his neck, twinged his nerves with a sharp jolt as he clenched his teeth together, forcing himself to be still.

The feeling of the contents of the syringe, emptying quickly through his veins, made him react from his stupor. He writhed or at least tried.

"EL!" He cried as the soldier hold him tighter.

It was Dantesque, seemed he was calling her and that only made her anguish grow. It was too much. Her father's pain fueled her with anger and at the same time, paralyzed her. She couldn't do anything to help him, and neither couldn't figure out where he was. The feeling of dizziness intensified.

"No!" Rage surged on her, "NO!"

Ivanov looked up. The fluorescent light on the ceiling had begun to blink, disturbing his sight.

Hopper fought to breathe, his chest burning even though he sucked in lungful after lungful air, but the blood that pumped through his veins burned like acid. A searing pain shot up his spine hitting the base of his skull like a flaming arrow. He couldn't help it, he screamed with all the few forces he had left.

That sound was so much heartbreaking that she also shouted in panic and anguish. The girl put her hands to her head, thinking she was fainting.

The fluorescent of the ceiling beamed with a great flash of light, illuminating the entire room for just a second before bursting into a thousand pieces.

Jones jumped in surprise at the sight of the radio's bursting; a high flame came from inside it. "Fuck!" He cursed as he quickly looked for a blanket to extinguish the fire.

Murray was still astonished.

"Hey, are you going to help me? Remember, this is your house!" Jones exclaimed, putting out the last flame.

"It was him," Murray stated. "It was his voice." His gaze fixed on Joyce, who was holding the girl on her arms — comforting her.

Jones put his hand on Bauman's shoulder, trying to get his attention. "Hey. Someone is going to explain to me what the hell is going on because this has been so weird."

"It was him. Jim. The damn Ruskies have Jim."

***** AUTHOR's NOTE: I want to announce that my beta reader has banished (No idea why :( ) so I would like to ask if someone would like to beta read this story. My first language isn't English so, in order to update it, I'll need someone to check the grammar errors. Please, PM me if you would like to help me :) This chapter wasn't checked so... I'm very sorry for my grammar or inconsistencies.**

7. Line in the sand

Thank you for your support! You're all great! Especially, thanks to StrangerThanXsAnatomy, my beta reader, for being so kind to me! :)

CHAPTER 7: Line in the sand

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Murray dumped the contents of the bottle of vodka. It was empty, and his glass had not even filled halfway. "Damn it." He cursed grumpily. A hand took away the glass of liquor and instead left a cup full of black coffee.

"Let's recap," Joyce said, sitting next to him and holding her own cup of coffee, bigger. "According to… the signal we have heard. The Russians have Hop."

Her voice went out as she translated into words what they had heard. Hopper's scream was still drilling her head. It had been scary. How long he would have to endure that?

"Joyce. Focus. If we want to find Jim. First, we have to know what we are facing and to have a clear idea, I need you to stop the bullshit and tell me what you are hiding from me."

Joyce wet her lips and looked around. Her eyes only found El, sitting on the sofa, holding her head with the palms of her hands, gaze lost, thoughtful.

"Where is Jones?" Joyce asked with a low voice.

"Not here. Eric has gone to town to call Owens."

"Why? Isn't it more comfortable to call from your phone?"

"Are you crazy? One thing is to have a fed here, and another thing is that my super secure line ceases to be… neither super nor safe. The phone is only and strictly for emergencies."

"I think this is an emergency," Joyce said in disbelief. She would never confess that she had already used his super-secret phone to call Jonathan.

"Joyce. Stop beating around the bush and tell me what happened. Until now, the Russians had kept a low profile, they had only talked about supplies, as if it were a sleeping cell, waiting for something to happen." He took a sip of coffee. "And suddenly, they infiltrate the pentagon to get the security recordings of Starcourt. Right now. Exactly when you think that Hopper is alive and... suddenly the radio starts to emit an impossible signal, proving you right. I'm a man who doesn't believe in coincidences, Joyce."

"You're right," she said, preparing for the roller coaster that was coming. "It is not a coincidence. The number that Hopper confessed to the Russians is not a number. Is a person. It's her. They're looking for her."

El got up from the couch when she heard about "her" and headed towards them.

Murray nodded, trying to process the information. "Ok. But. Why would Russians be interested in a girl? And why now?"

"Because they discovered me in the stolen recordings of Starcourt. There were pictures of Hopper and me. Of what I can do. They hurt him because they want to find me," She said with a lump in her throat. Thinking about it made her sick.

"So… they interrogate Hopper, make him confess, he leads them to some important details of Starcourt. Do we guess what it has to do with... the gate?" Murray scratched his beard. "With that information, they steal the security recordings and discover you. Wait ... how could you know all that? Because I still can't explain how we heard the radio signal ..."

The girl looked at Joyce, who nodded.

"With my powers."

Murray smiled incredulously, "Sorry, did you say? Powers?" His arm

pointed to the ground. "No, no, no. Line in the sand."

Joyce looked at him with a sheepish look. "Maybe, we ignored telling you that part the last time. It's a very long history." She answered dismissively.

"Seriously, Joyce? Seriously?!" He crossed his arms as his foot patted the floor, repeatedly. "You forgot to tell me that she has powers? And what kind of powers…" Murray trailed off. "Wait a minute… you are the Russian girl!"

El made a disgusted face, offended. "I am not Russian, and I need a Walkman. I think I have an idea."

Murray was lost at words. Children, he never liked them. His eyes looked at his coffee. It was not going to be enough.

"Ughh," Hopper grunted as his eyes opened. How many more times would he have to wake up like this? Judging by his battered body, not too many. The ceiling light was too bright, it gave him a headache. Where was he? His mind didn't remember much. He tried to turn his head to look around, his neck was burning. "Great ..." He murmured as he managed to look to his left.

In the fog of his eyes, he could barely see that he had been returned to his cell. Although he didn't understand why a guard was securing the door.

As soon as the soldier realized that the prisoner was awake, he looked at him with a grim face and adjusted the rifle in his hands, it was a warning.

Hopper smiled wryly. What should that poor devil think of him? He was not in such a position to move, and yet that soldier was armed to the teeth. They considered him dangerous, there was no doubt. Oddly enough, it comforted him.

He felt as cold fingers hold his wrist. He turned his head too sharply to the other side. Everything was spinning. His eyes closed, trying to avoid dizziness.

Definitely, this time, they had given him something stronger. He opened his eyes again to find the doctor taking his pulse on his wrist as he looked closely at his own wristwatch.

"Son of a b****, get away from me, or I'll going to…"

"To What." The doctor responded without taking his gaze off his watch. He didn't want to lose count.

Hopper was lost at words. "You… speak English?" His face couldn't hide his surprise. He had always heard him speak in Russian, although he didn't care much either, he wasn't going to start a conversation with him. What were they going to talk about? Weather?

"I am one of the few who speak it on this base. And I would recommend you to shut up. You would save strength, and I would work better. We all win." Smirnov said, turning to a small medical bag.

From the angle Hopper was lying, his eyes barely saw much. "To save strength ..." He smirked, fearing the worst. "So what, that your colonel can continue playing to be a tough guy as you use me as a Guinea Pig? Leave me sober one day, under the same conditions, and I'll send you both to hell."

"That's your problem, Rambo." The doctor answered. "The colonel likes to break the prisoners. You are a challenge for him. He won't leave you alone until he destroys you."

The American looked at the other man, shocked. Why did he share that information with him? Was he trying to scare him? "And you care about that? Look. I am... or was a policeman. I know how good cop and bad cop technique goes. Don't bother, it won't work with me."

"Good cop?" He laughed at that. "What worries me, seriously, is that you will die too early because they will blame me."

"Well... it seems that we're in the same shit then."

The Russian proceeded to lift part of Hop's shirt, exposing his belly.

The American began to get nervous, hating to feel so helpless.

"Calm down, Rambo. I'm going to take a look and to change your bandages. Do not move."

"As if I could have," Hopper smirked.

The doctor removed the previous bandage and made a nasty face, "I don't understand it. It should be closed by now, and it's still oozing. How did you get it?"

Hopper gulped, not wanting to remember the last encounter with the shadow monster. "Playing football, what do you think?"

While the doctor began to put on new bandages, Hopper looked at the soldier at the door. "What's wrong with him? He seems agitated."

"Gossips run very fast through the base. It's because of the fluorescent lamp exploding."

Hop looked back at him, trying to remember something, but none of that made sense in his battered head. "The what?"

"Oh, yes. In the last interrogation, a fluorescent lamp exploded. It's weird, there was no tension overload. And a light bulb can happen, but a fluorescent light? Impossible. So... they're starting to think that perhaps you have powers too, like the girl."

Hopper grimaced in disbelief as his mind processed that information. He prayed to heaven not to have said any stupidity about El. In spite of that, He was curious to discover what had happened. His gaze was fixed at the soldier again, that could be true, the man looked at him almost fearfully. How could he use that in his favor?

The doctor stretched the bandage enough to get back his attention.

"Ouch!"

"Hey ... don't go too smart because you're not. Now the colonel will want to check if you actually have powers, and believe me, he's quite imaginative, and not in a good way."

"Do you believe that I have powers?"

"It does not matter what I believe. But, if you had them, you would have escaped from here a long time ago. They are too stubborn and rigid to understand that."

Hopper glared at him suspiciously. "The colonel is not your cup of tea, ah?" That guy, despite his role as a sadistic scientist, was beginning to remind him of Alexei. Maybe, this man was just as scared of Russian soldiers as Alexei was. Who knows. Or perhaps he was just doing the good cop thing. Or nothing of all that, and he was just had a good day in hell. "What's your name?"

"Smirnov"

Hopper lifted a brown. "Finally, I know a real Smirnoff."

"It's Smirnov."

"Whatever"

Meanwhile, back in Goshen, Indiana.

It was the last dish left to wash when a series of hard knocks on the door made him turn off the tap. "Yes. I'm coming." Jonathan opened the door of the house, an FBI badge welcomed him, it belonged to a man with a suit and an expressionless face. "What?" Jonathan said without leaving his astonishment.

"Hello, kid," spoke another voice in a friendly tone as that man approached his partner. "Do you remember me?"

"Yes, I believe. You're the doctor who examined my brother, right?"

Precisely, with the fuss, Will approached the door. "Is something wrong, Doctor Owens?"

"No, no… nothing to be alarmed, I suppose." Owens hesitated, looking at both of them. "Is your mother at home?"

Jonathan looked confused. "I'm sorry? Of course not…"

"Yes, well, we are actually looking for Mr. Murray Bauman, but since he is a guy who ... does not like to be found, we are having some trouble locating him, we think maybe your mother could help us."

"How can you not know where Murray is?" Jonathan was starting to get nervous. "My mother has phoned saying that she is precisely with him, and also with the fed that you sent to Murray, yourself."

Owens exchanged worried glances with his partner.

"What the hell are you talking about, kid. What agent? We haven't sent anyone."

Hey! What do you think? Leave a review and let me know :)

8. Down the road

I'm very sorry for the delay in updating this. Life has been crazy this week.

Thank you very much for your reviews, it's always nice to hear from you. And I hope you all reviews this one too ;) let me know what do you think!

Special Thanks to my beta-reader StrangerThanXsAnatomy! You're great! :)

Chapter 8: Down the road

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Joyce kept walking around the living room of the house. Nothing made sense. At least now she was sure of one thing; Hopper was alive. Knowing that had relieved her. The last few months had been terrifying, thinking that, somehow, she was responsible for his death. That thought made her shiver.

She was also sure of something else; everything has a price. He was alive, yes, but for how long? How was he enduring that? The last thing they had heard was a kind of explosion, and then nothing, the radio had literally melted. What had happened next? Would he still be alive? Too many questions and too few answers.

El didn't want to talk about it. No one could blame her for it. Joyce had only heard the sound, and it broke her heart. But the girl had seen it with her own eyes. It had to have been horrible, nobody deserves to witness that.

The girl had asked Murray for a Walkman to hear the recording. That was what she did the last hour, listening to that terrible scene, over and over, in a loop.

That seemed sickly, but no one dared to tell her anything. Especially after she stated firmly that she needed to concentrate and recreate

the memory in her mind to find Hop.

"Joyce, if you keep going around, you're going to make a hole in the ground," Murray joked, pulling her out of her thoughts.

"This is ... too much." The woman sat on the sofa next to Murray, both looking at Eleven lying on the floor, with the Walkman's headphones on and eyes closed. Every time the recording ended, She rewound it and hit the play button again. They knew perfectly when she reached the end because her eyes were clenched, and her countenance was a mixture of concentration and pain.

"Honestly, I don't know what she's doing," Murray responded tired, the fatigue was making a dent in the man.

"She maintains that for a second, she saw the entire room where they held Hopper. She thinks that if she concentrates enough, she can remember it and maybe find out where he is."

Murray looked at his half-empty glass. "You believe it?"

"I think ... we should try anything to find him." Joyce leaned back on the sofa, feeling Bauman's questioning look on her. "During the last few months, I have not been able to stop thinking that, in the end, it was I who turned the keys. It was I who killed him."

Murray shocked his head. "Don't say that. After all, You saved the world."

"At what price?" Her gaze lowered, ashamed.

"Well... Now we know that Jim's not dead." He sighed.

"You have heard the same as me. Damn it, Murray, they are slowly killing him." Her hand flew to her mouth, suppressing her hurt.

Murray smiled sadly. "Joyce, promise me that if we get out of it, you'll put aside your stupid guilt and give yourself a damn chance with him."

Joyce pressed her lips nervously, trying hard to keep the tears back. "I know he would have done anything if he had been in my place, I

owe him that, okay? And please… now I need the damn vodka."

The man grinned gloomily. On the way to the kitchen, he had the habit of looking at the monitors connected to his security cameras. Two cars were parking outside the house. Several men began to get out of the vehicles, and the bottle slipped from his hands, falling to the ground and forming an endless glass. "Fuck, fuck, fuck!" He shouted in alarm.

"What's wrong?" Joyce asked, startled. El had also heard the noise and was approaching them.

"Let's go. NOW!" His voice raised exasperated.

The woman looked at the monitor, the men went to the door and were armed with Kalashnikov rifles. No doubt, they were Russian. "What the hell! How did they find us? Please, Murray, tell me you have another way out other than through the door."

"You offend me, Joyce, of course, I have an emergency exit. Come on, over here!"

Joyce took El's hand and followed Murray to a door that led down to a basement.

Their feet were stumbling over all the steps as they rushed down into the underground space. "Come on, come on, don't stop." Murray murmured, as several blows indicated the Russians were trying to knock the door down.

Quickly, he went to a closet, which -as in all good mystery movies- turned out to be a hidden door that hid other stairs up.

"Seriously?" Joyce would have laughed if their lives were not in danger.

They began to climb them just as the door of the house gave way. The Russians were inside the house.

Murray climbed outside the back of the house. His lungs barely had breath, definitely too old for that. His hand helped Joyce and El to exit the house, and when they were going to run away, the engine of

a car came alive, and multiple headlights dazzled the three of them.

Joyce covered her face with her arm trying to make her eyes adjust to the sudden light, but she could immediately see two men aiming at them with rifles. A third one got out of the car and approached them as well.

"How rushed you are, Bauman." The voice didn't have a Russian accent. "Fortunately, this week, I've had time to see all the exits of the house."

Murray couldn't believe it. "Jones? What the hell are you doing?" The FBI agent? What did he do with the Russians?

"Sorry, Bauman. It's nothing personal." He came close enough to look at the three of them. "My friends here just want the girl. Give her to us, and we will leave. Don't do anything stupid, and no one will be hurt."

"Bullshit," Joyce replied, stepping forward. "Do you think we are going to trust you, after all of this? You are a damn Russian spy! And I have already seen what you are capable of doing ... If you think you can come here and take away the girl, you must be delirious."

"Joyce..." Murray began, knowing that this was not going to end well. They were armed guys, and he was practically in slippers!

"No! This guy is probably the cause of our problems."

"Joyce, for the love of God, just shut up!" He exploded.

"Fuck, he could even be the spy in the Pentagon, the one who stole the Starcourt recording tapes."

Murray raised his arms angrily without believing what Joyce had just done.

"Bauman is right. You have to shut up. Now I'm afraid we can't let you go. You know too much." A gun appeared in his hand. "Give us the girl, and I promise it will be fast."

Eleven saw how the Russians cocked their weapons. It was clear that

those men were looking for her and that they did not want witnesses. They were bad men, just as bad as her Papa's, and would probably kill Joyce and Murray.

Why did they always hurt everyone around her? Her mind returned to the schoolyard. The moment when Jodie's friends beat Will because she challenged that girl. Eleven felt her stomach churn. Now it was the turn of Joyce and Murray simply because they were with her ... and she couldn't do anything to avoid it, could she? She didn't have powers, not at will. Her mind was a cluster of thoughts, she needed to think and fast. When had she been able to use her powers recently? Yes. She broke the bikes of Jodie's friends. How could she do it? What was different? Then her nightmares... In both moments she had felt distressed, angry.

Those men aimed their weapons at them as words echoed in her mind, it was her sister, Seven. 'Think about what makes you angry and use it.' Yes. The fuel of her powers must be that. Deep inside her brain, she tried to remember her papa again, back in the lab... but it wasn't useful, not anymore. Perhaps because it was a distant memory now. She tried again, this time when Jodie's friend hit Will... didn't work either. What's wrong with her!

Time was running out. The eyes of those men were impassive, hard as stone, as if that were normal as ... like that soldier, the one at the side of Hopper while they interrogated him. While they hurt him, Hop. Yes, they harmed him because of her. That image was still fresh in her mind. That raw screaming, unbearable pain. Her heart was tired of losing her friends. No more.

"No more!" She screamed as rage consumed her inside. The three men were thrown several meters back.

"Jesus Christ" Murray exclaimed, perplexed.

Joyce looked at Jones's car. The engine was still alive. Relieved, her breath came out in a rush. "Don't just stand there, run to the car!"

They didn't think twice. The woman climbed into the driver's seat and pressed the accelerator and the car shot off down the road. She glanced in the rearview mirror and saw as the Russians began to get

up, and got in the other vehicle. They were not going to escape so easily.

Murray looked behind from the back seat, next to Eleven. "Faster, Joyce!"

"I'm trying!"

The fatigue was taking its toll on the girl. Every time she used her powers, her body came to the point of exhaustion. But she must remain firm, they need her.

The other car was rapidly approaching them. The lights of the headlights getting closer.

"They'll catch us! Why is this piece of junk not running? Stop driving like a worried mother!" Bauman cried, clearly overwhelmed.

The car rammed them from behind, throwing her steering off. "Hold on!" Joyce cried while regaining control. She saw with concern as the Russian car began to overtake them on the left, getting to their own height. Joyce stepped on the accelerator to the bottom; if they passed them, they would cut their way.

Both cars were going at the same speed. The woman turned to look at the other driver. Jones was behind the wheel, smiling sarcastically. The spy took a sharp turn of the wheel, hitting them with his vehicle. The sparks came out of both car bodies.

Murray held onto the seat. "Fuck! He wants to kick us off the road!"

"Not if I kick him first." Joyce turned sharply to the left, hitting the other car, the wheels squeaked against the asphalt.

"What the hell are you doing, Joyce?!" Murray was now screaming.

El saw terrified how one of the Russians in the back seat lowered the window and pulled out a gun, ready to shoot. No, no, no! A feeling of overwhelm began to take hold of her. Her hands-on her temples, terrified of failing at that moment. She tried to return to the same scene of pain, the one that gave her strength, which made her resurface her powers from the depths of her heart. Hopper's pain. She

saw him again, suffering in that room, the room ... the ceiling light flickering, the flash ... the entire room, illuminated for a few moments, the cry of pain ...

Murray saw astonished as the car of the Russians jumped through the air, and crashed into the road, rolling over behind them. "Holy shit!" He managed to say.

El collapsed in the back seat. The nose was dripping with blood. "Hawkins ..." she groaned.

Joyce looked at her in the rearview mirror. "Honey, are you okay?"

"Hawkins," El repeated, trying to speak louder.

"I think she's delirious," Murray observed as he caught her up. "Calm down. You're bleeding."

"No!" She protested, angry. "I remember the room, saw it, I was there..." her voice was losing strength, clearly exhausted. "Found him. Hop."

Without taking her eyes off the way, Joyce groped the glove box with her right hand, looking for a rag to stop El's bleeding, her fingers touched a gun. "Hold on, honey!" Finally, she picked up a cloth and threw it at the man.

"He's in Hawkins. Lab." El murmured with the last of her might.

The car slowed and stopped on the roadside. Joyce needed clarification of what her ears had just heard.

"She's fainted," Murray informed her as he tried to plug the girl's nose.

"Did you hear the same as I did?" She asked, worried.

"Yes. But that's impossible. It could be just a delirium of a girl that... is tired."

Joyce shocked her head, her eyes focused on the road ahead of them. "Repeat to me her exact words."

"You don't believe that Hopper is being held by the Russians in an American facility, right?"

"An abandoned American facility," She corrected.

"Exactly. It's closed, sealed, even walled up. Even the government wants to forget that the building even exists."

Joyce exhaled, her eyes focused on the road ahead of them. She was sure something was missing. "I don't know, Murray. Think about it. Alexei explained they had already tried to open the portal in Russia without success. The ideal place for this is Hawkins, everything began there."

"Yes, that's why they set up their base in Hawkins, using the mall as a cover."

"What if... after the fiasco, the Russians that remained continued with the experiment."

"Impossible. Its base was dismantled."

"Sure. But they could continue with another base that was already assembled. The laboratory. It's perfect. Who would think about it? No one would look for them there." Joyce turned on her seat to look at Bauman. "You said that the building had been boarded up. Could you tell me what's on the other side?"

Murray raised an eyebrow. "Joyce, it's the craziest, absurd and paranoid thing I've ever heard. But..." His voice paused for a long moment, and she could hear his uneven breathing. "I would believe you. Yes. But we need minimal proof that relates it to the Russians. I don't have it."

Joyce smiled. "I do. Look. There was a giant Russian thug who I thought was responsible for monitoring the Soviet facilities. Well... it's a long story, the thing is that Hop and I went to the lab, just to check a theory, and that thug was there, he even beat Hopper. Why would the Russians be watching the laboratory if they had no interest in it?"

Murray frowned, deep in thought. "Ok. I like it." He simply said, after

all, he was the paranoiac man. A reasonable conspiracy conjecture was his cup of tea. "But. What do we do now?"

Joyce adjusted her hands on the steering wheel. "There are 90 miles to Hawkins, we've got a full tank of gas, half a pack of cigarettes and a gun." Her fingers turn the ignition key, and the engine became alive. "We're going to rescue Hop."

Comments are appreciated! And thank you for keep reading! ;)

9. An old friend

It's been a long time since the last update; I'm so so sooo sorry but I've had a crazy busy week...

I want to thank you for your patience, your reviews and your messages. You're fantastic!

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Chapter 9: An old friend

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This time they had let Hopper rest for a full day. He was beginning to wonder if they had finally forgotten him, very naive on his part. It was evident that not in a million years that would happen, but being so long alone, locked in a cell gives you time to think a lot, too much.

Would they have obtained the information they were looking for? He thought about what Smirnoff, sorry, Smirnov had told him. Something happened in the last interrogation, something that scared the soldiers. He tried to remember, but it was useless. If they had said to him that a giant unicorn passed in front of him, he wouldn't remember either.

There was something about it, Smirnov had talked about the light, yes, a lamp exploding. He's seen it before. When El got angry, the lights got fun. Was it a coincidence? Don't be stupid, accidents do not exist. Would El be looking for him? He ran his hand over his face, that thought began to overwhelm him. Among all the people, she was the last one he wanted to look for him.

His mission as a father was to protect her, he had always done it or at least tried. Going for him was getting into the wolf's mouth. No, under no circumstances could He allow it. But what options did he have to prevent it? The only consolation to endure all that was to

know that she was okay. He sighed. The door of his cell opened again. Two soldiers were waiting on the other side. One with a rifle and the other with handcuffs. Well, his time for meditation was over.

The Owens' agents soon began to search Bauman's house. The address the Byers had given him seemed correct. That could be absolutely the home of a lunatic, except that a cyclone appeared to have passed through it.

Everything was out of place, as if a squad of men had been rampaging and causing even more disorder. Owens sighed. He did not like being late to the sites and less when there was a damn Russian spy infiltrated in his organization. He was beginning to not trust even his shadow. Was Jones' case isolated, or would there be someone else?

"I want this mess clean as a whistle. Any clue to the whereabouts of Bauman and Mrs. Byers is important." He was beginning to have doubts that they could find nothing useful among that disorder.

Jonathan could not believe his eyes. He had been at Bauman's house before, along with Nancy, and although it seemed like the home of an eccentric the first time, that image far exceeded his expectations. He walked absorbed, watching as the agents took photos of everything they found. His feet collided with something on the floor. It was an Old Walkman, next to a notebook. He could not resist, all those things that were related to music nuts him. But he soon realized that the cassette did not contain any song.

"I think you should see this," he said, taking the Walkman. "It looks like a Russian recording or something. In this notebook is the transcript. Bauman must have translated it."

Owens looked at him in disbelief, "What the hell are you doing here, boy? I told you to wait in the car. This is not a damn game! It's dangerous, okay?"

Jonathan was displeased and almost seemed offended. "Do you want us to stay idly by? If it weren't for us, you would still be looking for Bauman's house. And fuck, it's our mother. We may not be cops, but

at least we know we have no spies in our house."

Owens missed his stress ball, so he just looked away, cursing inwardly. He took Jonathan by the arm and without a word, took him out of the house.

"I told you to wait in the car with your brother, and that is what you will do."

"No! What are you doing? This is important." Jonathan reluctantly protested that he tried to get rid of the government agent.

"Hey! If you continue protesting, I will have no choice but to arrest you for contempt of authority, you understand that? And now to the car."

Jonathan reluctantly entered the car and was surprised to see that Owens also came and closed the door. "Damn. Byers! You can't go around telling the four winds that we have a spy inside, okay? Because they are never alone and I don't want to give the Russians more information, okay? Let's see, give me that…" He stated, taking the notebook and quickly reading the notes. As he moved along the lines, his expression was changing, worry took over his entire face. There was a word that changes everything: 'Eleven.'

"Shit ... "Owens murmured under his breath. "The Soviets have one of ours, it seems we have one more problem. God, we have no time for that." The federal's gaze was fixed in the older Byers boy. His face was pale as he removed the Walkman's headphones.

"Easy boy. I guess it's hard to hear this ..." Owens said, waving the notebook. "That's why I told you to wait in the car."

Jonathan looked at his brother and then at the other man. "It's not that. El was right. The whole time. The Russians have Hopper."

Will looked at both of them, trying to assimilate all the news. None looked back, and the silence took over the interior of the car. Then he dared to ask the question everyone wanted to avoid. "Where is mom and El?"

Owens sighed. It was going to be challenging to answer them; it

seemed that their problems kept growing. "I want you to know that we are going to do our best to find them, all of them, okay?"

Jonathan crossed his arms skeptically. "And how do you intend to do it? You can't even speak in front of your men for fear of having another infiltrate."

Owens pointed a finger to the air. "Hey. I trust each and every one of my closest men, but if I start sowing doubts in front of them ... they wouldn't trust each other, and everything would go to hell, you know?"

Jonathan was about to respond as the car's radio came alive.

"Agent, 0365. I repeat, agent 0365, Philadelphia code. Do you copy?" A male voice roared over the comm.

The man rolled his eyes. That radio signal could only mean another problem, and his list of issues was already complete. However, he picked up the transmitter. "Here, 0365. Go ahead."

"Philadelphia code with antique chariot identification has been received. Should I continue?"

Owens closed the transmitter for a moment and looked at the boys occupying the rear seats. "It's the code I gave the chief for emergencies. I do not like this at all."

Jonathan anxiety was growing. "Do you think the Russians would have forced him to send a message? Is it a safe line?"

Will looked dumbfounded. "Stop being silly. If we don't listen to the message, we'll never know."

Owens reopened communication. "Proceed."

The voice rang again on the radio. "Message: The great red fox has hunted in the forest. Frogs are needed in the pond. End of the message."

Everyone looked at each other in disbelief.

They had passed through various halls, including several stairs. Those corridors were new for Hopper and in an area far away from his cell. He feared the worst. Smirnov had told him that now the Colonel wanted to know if he had powers. Stupid man. But giving him a full day to recover supported that hypothesis. He just needed to find out what idiocy the Russian guy had thought this time.

Whatever it was, He was very screwed. Or maybe, they got tired of him and were taking him outside to ... execute him. He gulped. All of his options were horrible. After a corridor that seemed infinite, they arrived at a new room. Inside it was another cell with bars. He didn't understand what they intended, although he supposed he was about to find out.

The soldiers led him into the cell, and one of them removed his handcuffs. Hopper massaged his wrists as he watched the door close behind him. Something wasn't right, that place seemed more like a cage than a cell. The soldiers remained outside, just staring. That was all?

"What. Do you like the show? Because in this case, it will be a bit boring."

"Oh ... I think not." A new figure approached the bars of his new cell. "Although the duration of the show will depend on you, Mr. Hopper."

"Oh, look who it is. Should I be surprised, Colonel?"

The Russian smiled. Too much for Hopper's taste. Oh shit... he was definitely in serious trouble.

"I wonder what you thought this time? Haven't these last days been entertaining enough for you?"

"Came on, Mr. Hopper, I thought you would be more grateful." Ivanov grinned, "If you don't like the treatment we give you, we may have to remind you where you come from."

Hopper raised an eyebrow, did not understand that. The Colonel snapped his fingers, and a soldier approached a crank. He began to turn it, and a mechanism started to squeak. The American followed

with a look pulleys moving a chain that ran along the ceiling of his cell. His sight reached a door in the wall that began to rise.

"No way ..." He murmured under his breath. At that time, he thought that everything that had happened was a trifle compared to what was coming.

A beast crossed the door, and suddenly, he forgot how to breathe. It was a Demogorgon and seemed pissed off.

It soon searched the cell and turned to Hopper. "Jesus..." The monster lunged at him, and all he could do was protect himself with his arms.

After a few seconds, that seemed endless, nothing happened. Only the clink of a chain broke the silence.

Slowly Hopper withdrew his arms and watched as the Demogorgon writhed in the middle of the cell. A large iron chain attached to his neck prevented him from moving further. He quickly turned around, clinging to the bars of the cell.

"You bastard son of a bitch!" Hopper roared, facing the Colonel.

The military made a disapproving gesture "I don't think they are the most appropriate words in your situation, don't you think?"

Hopper hit the bars angrily. He couldn't believe his damn bad luck, so much hardship spent on the upside-down to end up devoured by one of those beasts simply because a damn lunatic had decided so.

He didn't even have the option to defend himself. His head leaned against one of the bars.

"What the hell do you want from me."

The Colonel smiled. "See? That's much better. I will tell you what will happen. When the crank turns again, the monster will catch you, and well, you know what comes next." Ivanov paused dramatically, he was undoubtedly enjoying that moment of despair. "So the only way you have to face it is ... using your powers if you have them."

Hopper laughed nervously. "Really? And what if I don't have them?"

"Well, in that case ..." Ivanov nodded to the Demogorgon, "Someone is going to have a good dinner today." The sound of the chains, moving non-stop, indicated that the beast must be hungry. Great.

"A pity." The Russian added, "We'll have to settle for ... Jane."

Hopper raised his head at the name of Eleven. The Colonel's eyes shone when he realized that he had touched a sore point.

"Oh, yes… ironic. The girl you have tried so hard to protect, isn't it? I admire your tenacity, really. Many would have been broken days ago, but not you." It was evident that he was enjoying that. "Don't worry, I will tell her that you endured until the end, I can also tell her soon as my agents bring her on the way here."

"You lie…"

The Russian moved closer to the bars. "Tell me, do you think Jane will endure as much as you?"

Hopper turned enraged, he preferred to see the beast that was about to swallow him than that bastard. In fact, the Demogorgon seemed even more human. All this time, the only thing that gave him strength was knowing that she was okay. He no longer cared about his imminent destiny, knowing that El was in danger, that the Russians had trapped her... just destroyed his hopes. Everything had been in vain. The logical thing was to feel depressed, but all he felt was anger, why him?

"Do you want me to tell her something?"

Hopper knew what the Colonel wanted. No. He was not going to give him that pleasure. "Go to hell!"

"You first." Ivanov pointed to the soldier who was holding the crank, and the chain mechanism turned again.

Yes, he was going to die, but what the hell. Do not go gentle into that good night.

The chain yielded, and the Demogorgon launched itself at him. Hopper shouted angrily if that beast was rabid, he was much more.

He managed to dodge it, and the creature crashed into the bars. The Demogorgon turned back to him, opened his petal-shaped head, showing him all its teeth.

"Oh yeah? Do you think I'm going to wimp out? If you want fresh meat, you will have to hunt for it."

The beast gained momentum and throw itself against Hopper. He screamed in fury and discharged all his anger against the creature. His fist punched its head, throwing it back to the ground.

The adrenaline had helped him face that Demogorgon, but his body was too affected by the last days. He was panting tiredly. The Demogorgon stood up and showed him his claws.

"Oh, man ..." He muttered, knowing he couldn't take much more. That animal approached at high speed and tried to give him a blow that he could dodge, only to wince as his open wound in the abdomen protested the action and sent out a wave of pain. He lightly pressed down on his side as his body collapsed to the ground. In just a few seconds, the beast was upon him, and he could only interpose his forearm between that thing and him, only a few centimetres separated his face from those sharp teeth. It was a struggle that he couldn't win and finally gave in. He closed his eyes, hoping it would end quickly.

Disgusting breath passed his neck, next to something sticky and wet. Slime? Gross. His heart raced so fast that his chest began to hurt. Frightened, He opened one eye and saw the animal sniffing at him. Although he did not understand what was happening, he did not dare to move. The Demogorgon continued snooping, first his face, and then finally down to his chest. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw how Russian soldiers approached the bars of the cell. They seemed as surprised as he was.

The Demogorgon sniffed the wound, perhaps the blood had caught his attention, but to everyone's surprise, the beast looked indifferently at his prey and ignored him, beginning to wander around the cell.

The Colonel said something in Russian. He didn't understand it but

didn't care either. Hopper took a deep breath and stayed on the floor, oblivious to his surroundings. He was losing consciousness when his head began to spin, and his eyes began to blur. The sound of an alarm rumbled in the room. He heard it farther and farther, and then everything went black.

In the meantime…

Owens was astonished. "What the hell this means. Why would the chief send this message?"

Jonathan rummaged through his backpack while he talked. "Because it is not a message from Hopper. It's Bauman."

"Explain it."

"Yes, Bauman gave us a notebook to decode his messages, you know, he's quite… paranoid. I put it in my backpack, just in case."

Owens laughed in disbelief. "Seriously? Have you brought that? Fuck, you're a good journalist. Wait ... what's that? Don't tell me you've written down the coded, secret message in your notebook. That's a crime, kid."

"Does matters? Now we have it complete to be able to decipher it."

Owens made a gesture of disapproval. "Well, let's see if at least Bauman explains what the hell is going on here. Although it's good news, if they have been able to send that message, it means they have not been taken by the Russians, that's good."

Will seemed absorbed, his eyes were lost. "Not good."

Jonathan looked worried at his brother. "What's wrong?"

Will ran his hand across his neck, had goosebumps. "He's back. It's here." He turned, his eyes wide. "The mind flayer is here."

I love plot twists! Yes, this one was crazy but I promise I'll explain it in the next chapter ;) Btw… Did you like it? :S